

Orig: GOP

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Back to the bad old days

The Republican National Committee is trying to play politics with something that all Americans should be ashamed of: the dirty history of dirty tricks of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The GOP committee accused President Carter and the Democratic Party of bringing about "massive intelligence failures." It said efforts by Carter and the Democratic-controlled Congress, including reduction of secret operations abroad, have hurt morale and created uncertainty about the reliability of U.S. intelligence.

The committee therefore proposed a U.S. intelligence overhaul to lift many of the restrictions. It seeks the creation of a Foreign Operations Service, which would use agent spies in civilian jobs abroad as cover for secret operations. The CIA's directive against the use of journalists, clergymen and educators would be nullified.

The Democratic Party does not have a monopoly on CIA abuses or intelligence failures. The agency planned assassinations, tried to destabilize governments and engaged in other sleazy activity during the administrations of Republicans and Democrats. The debacle of the Bay of Pigs was the work of John F. Kennedy (Democrat) and the

overthrow of a freely elected — but Marxist — government in Chile was arranged under Richard M. Nixon (Republican). Serious proposals to reform the CIA have been made by Republicans (like Nelson A. Rockefeller) and Democrats (like Frank Church).

The no-holds-barred years were not the glory days of the CIA. They were the years of its greatest failures, and the agency and the country are still paying for these failures, particularly in the Third World, where the CIA is remembered (often accurately) as the ally of dictators.

The best way to erode morale in the CIA and to create uncertainty about its product is to exploit the agency for political advantage. That will drive out the professionals faster than any prohibition against poison plots, LSD experiments or back-alley bordellos.

The GOP committee's proposal to allow the CIA to use journalists is particularly dangerous. Journalists must be independent of any government agency — especially agencies like the CIA. The minute one reporter is exposed as a part-time CIA agent, all reporters will be under suspicion.

The CIA ought to do its own work.